

# Closing the Wealth Gap: Building Family & Community Economic Success



Report of the 2011 SRABC Conference  
October 20-21, 2011  
Point Clear, Alabama



Southern Regional  
Asset Building Coalition

Sponsored by the Ford Foundation

---

## COALITION PARTNERS

---

The Alabama Asset Building Coalition

War on Poverty - Jacksonville  
(Florida Asset Building Coalition)

Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
(Louisiana Grassroots Coalition)

The Coalition for a Prosperous Mississippi

Florida Agriculture & Mechanical University

Tuskegee University

Center for Social Development at  
Washington University in St. Louis

Realize Consulting Group, LLC

# Closing the Wealth Gap: Building Family & Community Economic Success

---

*By Jasmine Bass &  
Edited by Julia Stevens & Gena Gunn McClendon*







## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Regional Asset Building Coalition (SRABC) hosted its fourth annual conference: Closing the Wealth Gap: Building Family and Economic Success at Grand Hotel Marriot Resort, Golf Club & Spa in Point Clear, Alabama October, 20-21, 2011. The conference was funded by the Ford Foundation. This year's conference was a success with members of 85 organizations dedicated to closing the wealth gap for low-income individuals and communities in attendance. Although the SRABC is a multi-state coalition comprised of four states along the Gulf Coast, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, attendees were present from 16 states across the country.



Conference attendees enjoyed four plenary sessions, a legislative panel, state coalition breakout sessions, a FDIC awards ceremony, a plenary panel and a host of other presentations in the course of the two day event. Conference speakers and presenters held a wealth of knowledge in asset building practices and policy.

## BUILDING ECONOMIC SECURITY OVER A LIFETIME INITIATIVE

*Rick Williams, Program Director - Ford Foundation*

Mr. Williams' presentation provided conference attendees with insight on the Ford Foundation's initiative of assisting families, individuals and communities in the Southern Blackbelt region to build economic security.

Mr. Williams' presentation included the Ford Foundation's four approaches to meeting the overall initiative of facilitating and strengthening the economic security of the region. These four approaches are: Finding the state and regional saving, asset building coalitions; Supporting research and widespread dissemination of information on saving and asset policy; Building a policy communications infrastructure between national and state policy; and Supporting research, education, and advocacy on social security for low-wage workers.

Mr. Williams' presentation also provided conference attendees with information on the finding of a mid-year project assessment of the Ford Foundation conducted to provide information on how to strengthen the regional asset building efforts. This mid-year assessment showed the Ford Foundation the voices of the grass roots were missing from the conversation. The Ford Foundation decided to create the SRABC to ensure the voices of the grassroots were included in conversations about asset building. The Foundation also considered coalitions to be the most effective way for individuals to have have impact on federal and local policy.

Mr. William's presentation also covered the issue the Ford Foundation and the SRABC were committing to working on this year. A wide array of exciting endeavors is in the making for the

coalition this year. The coalition plans to reach out and continue to attract more voices into the coalition. The SRABC is also dedicated to continuing to listen and educate at the grassroots about the building of assets and its advantages. Another goal for the SRABC this year is to look at including a larger array of community development organizations, such as education, healthcare, housing, etc. In addition to these goals for the year, the SRABC is dedicated to developing and articulating a policy agenda this year.

## ASSET BUILDING: HISTORY, POLICY AND RESEARCH

*Michael Sherraden, Center for Social Development, Washington University in St. Louis*

Dr. Michael Sherraden was the next speaker to take the stage at the conference. Dr. Sherraden's presentation began with his discussion of the importance of the issue of property in America. Dr. Sherraden elaborated on property being what people in America have and accumulate in the hopes of being able to leave something to their children.

Dr. Sherraden also discussed the presence of asset building endeavors among minority populations throughout American history. He mentioned figures such as Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells, and Eloise Cabell, and their contributions to societal well-being through helping others build and retain assets.



Dr. Sherraden then entered into the present situation in the U.S. around asset building and wealth. He spoke on the recent recession and its effects on low-income people of color because of high occurrences of loss in home values and predatory lending among these populations. He also brought attention to the inequality of wealth in the U.S. and the difference between wealth and income flow. Another very important issue discussed in Dr. Sherraden's presentation was the predictors of educational success of children. Dr. Sherraden discussed how research shows that parental education and asset related measures were the strongest predictors of educational success for youth.

Dr. Sherraden's presentation included insight into what has transpired in the world of asset building and IDA development since the publication of his book, *Assets and the Poor*. Dr. Sherraden stated there has been some positive change since the publication of his book and the introduction of IDA's into society, but there are still factors present in society, which need to be addressed to make asset building among low-income individuals and communities successful. Among the positives mentioned were the discussion of asset building programs has been created in the U.S. and there is now more evidence of what will work and what is not likely to work. However, Dr. Sherraden cited lack change in U.S. policy to promote asset building programs among low-income people no change in the distribution of the resources (i.e. Lots of tax benefits have historically and are presently contributing to wealth inequality) as areas where

asset building work has not achieved much success.

In addition, Dr. Sherraden spoke about successful asset building efforts in other countries around the world, using Singapore as an example. Dr. Sherraden shared with the audience Singapore's subsidized asset building policy for the entire population. Using the comparison of the bottom 20% of the population in Singapore has an average net worth of over \$100,000 (a result of widespread asset building policies), while in the U.S. the bottom 20% has a negative net worth, really emphasized the need to develop an asset building model that can be taken to scale in the U.S.

Finally, Dr. Sherraden ended his presentation with some exciting insight into the work being done around asset building at Washington University's Center for Social Developments (CSD). Dr. Sherraden revealed that the newest asset building project the center has undertaken is centered on Child Development Accounts. The CSD is currently investigating Child Development Accounts as a consideration for U.S. policy through the SEED for Oklahoma Kids experiment. The CSD is also working with the Korean government to ensure all institutionalized babies in Korea have a savings account.

## BUILDING ASSETS THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION: POLICY AND PRACTICE

*Shirley Sherrod, The Sherrod Institute*

After Dr. Sherraden's presentation on asset building, Mrs. Shirley Sherrod took the stage and gave a dynamic presentation on her experiences in asset building work. Mrs. Sherrod focused on her past and present experiences with a land trust she and others developed in Georgia, New Communities and the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Social and Economic Justice, an organization dedicated to unifying community leaders from Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi to combine efforts in economic development of the regions they serve. Mrs. Sherrod also provided conference attendees with some insight into the nature of the work she performed in the role of the USDA's leader of the Office of Rural Development in Georgia.



Mrs. Sherrod first discussed the New Communities collective. New Communities operated on the Israeli Kibbutz movement's model. The collective sent seven people to Israel to study the Kibbutz model and began working on an adaptation of the model in rural Georgia in the early 1970s. The collective was able to secure 6000 acres of land, which it acquired through a planning grant through the Office of Economic Opportunity during the Nixon administration. The land was in a great location for development. There were around 200 miles of highway frontage and a railroad spur located on the land. The collective struggled with the lack of support to minority farmers and the land was eventually foreclosed on in 1985. However,



in 1999, New Communities filed a claim against the USDA as part of a class action lawsuit addressing the Department of Agriculture's ignoring, dismissal and mistreatment of black farmers. Initially, the claim was denied, but New Communities sought an appeal. In 2006 New Communities received a letter from the chief administrator informing them the case needed to be reviewed and they would be informed once a decision was reached. New Communities awaited a decision until 2009, when they were awarded \$12 million to cover the value of the land and everything they had paid on the loans they received from Farmer's Home. New Communities is currently in the process of developing new land they have secured in Albany, Georgia to begin a new rural farmer's collective.

Mrs. Sherrod also went into detail about her present involvement with the Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative for Social and Economic Justice (SRBWI). This group has several projects and initiatives operating in the rural south. The group runs a worker owned sewing cooperative, a commercial kitchen and supplies one of the largest school systems in the area with healthy lunches. SRBWI members, from the three different states, also work together to advocate for public policies that help families and communities in their region gain economic independence.

While working for the USDA as the leader of the Office of Rural Development in Georgia Mrs. Sherrod said she had two major initiatives. These initiatives were to give people knowledge of the programs they were eligible for and to influence equal opportunity for everyone to participate in USDA programs. Mrs. Sherrod and her team, using \$20,000 as the median household income, identified communities that had median incomes falling below this cutoff and targeted the nine poorest communities in the region to provide USDA assistance. The team Mrs. Sherrod headed performed at a level they had never seen under any previous leadership.

Mrs. Sherrod ended her presentation with a focus on the pressing need of collective activity. Mrs. Sherrod explained the examples of the initiatives she has been involved in stress the importance of working together throughout the region, as she believes the lack of this important aspect has been the greatest failure of asset building practices in the past.

## LEGISLATIVE PANEL: THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSETS: A LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVE

*Senator Anthony C. Hill - Florida & Senator Vivian D. Figures - Alabama*

Senator Vivian D. Figures began her presentation with sharing her desire to be a voice for the voiceless as her reason for deciding to become involved in politics. She stated it was her belief people don't always want a hand-out, but a hand up and some government policy serves to keep people down. In her view it is hard to build assets when you're in debt or don't know how to manage money and the legislature needs to do more to help people help themselves.

Senator Figures took this opportunity to communicate to SRABC conference attendees the importance of building relationships with legislators. She told attendees that some legislators can't imagine what it's like to not have money to buy groceries, pay a light bill or get your children the things they need. Therefore, legislators may not have these perspectives in mind when they vote to pass legislation. The building of relationships between asset building professionals and legislators would serve to show these legislators what effects legislation they pass has on people who have to deal with these issues in their everyday lives. Senator Figures told attendees legislators work for the people and they need to hear from the people.



Senator Anthony C. Hill added his perspective on the legislative perspective in asset building. He stated the only way to change policy was through elected officials. He urged the organization in attendance at the conference to be bold and approach legislators with their ideas, needs and concerns. He stated the opportunity for change is definitely here, but asset building advocates have to elevate the conversation and out work their opponents.

Senator Hill urged the SRABC's regional and states coalitions to form a legislative committee, whose primary purpose would be to approach legislators and influence them in policy decisions affecting asset building practices for the individual states and the region. He also reminded conference attendees of the importance of having a legislative agenda and meeting with legislators on a more personal level before the Congress and the Senate convenes to vote on legislation.

Senator Hill used an example of a successful Florida campaign to raise the minimum wage to promote the importance of engaging collective action and planning activities before approaching legislators to influence their policy making decisions. Since the issue was of great importance, Senator Hill stated supporters of a raise in minimum wage gathered supporters and traveled across the state raising awareness and promoting their position on this issue. As a result the minimum wage in the state was raised by a dollar and indexed.

## SRABC REGIONAL POLICY IMITATIVE: THE FARM BILL

*Jerry Pennick, Federation of Southern Cooperatives*

Following the presentations of the Alabama and Florida Senators, Jerry Pennick gave an informative presentation on the Farm Bill and how this piece of legislation could be used by the SRABC to promote asset building opportunities in the communities it serves. In the past the communities of color have only received a very small portion (under one billion dollars) of the 280 billion dollars allocated by the Farm Bill to assist rural communities. The SRABC hopes to raise this amount through lobbying to add provisions to the bill that will directly benefit communities of color.

In preparation of influencing policy makers' decisions on Farm Bill legislation, the SRABC has held over 12 listening sessions. The sessions were held for community leaders from Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida and there were over 300 people in attendance in total. The SRABC listening sessions provided the SRABC with numerous ideas for policy recommendations for Farm Bill Legislation in four major areas (nutrition, infrastructure, agriculture and rural housing).

Title IV of the Farm Bill is the component that targets nutrition and receives the largest portion of the bill's funding. In relation to nutrition, SRABC listening sessions uncovered many of the communities the coalition serves need significant technical assistance in utilizing this resource. The SRABC has three major recommendations for Title IV funding of the Farm Bill usage in communities of color. The first recommendation of the SRABC suggests Tuskegee and Florida A&M University to perform a study on rural hunger. The coalition also would like for ranchers and farmers to participate in the SNAP program, supporting farmers and ranchers being subsidized to be able to afford EBT equipment. Finally, in relation to nutrition, the SRABC would like to fund a community and school gardening program, which would promote self-sufficiency through good agricultural practices.

Mr. Pennick also shared the SRABC's policy initiative's goals related to using the Farm Bill to improve the Black Belt Region's infrastructure. Mr. Pennick expressed the desire to give community leaders the opportunity to be involved at infrastructure development being performed by the Delta Regional Authority to ensure the communities have a voice in the decision making process and the distribution of resources. The SRABC proposes broadband development, small business development and funding to develop a rural policy institute in the Black Belt Region as policy recommendations for Farm Bill financed infrastructure projects.

In addition to nutrition and infrastructure recommendations, the policy committee also identified opportunities and numerous policy recommendations in the area of agriculture. Through listening sessions the coalition found the need for improved equitable access to agricultural programs. The SRABC will recommend there be a minimum of five percent of the funding of agricultural programs targeted towards underrepresented farmers. The coalition also plans to recommend Farm Bill Section 2501 funding be increased by ten percent. Furthermore, the SRABC plans to recommend increased funding in equipment program funding and increases in producer grants.

The final area of Farm Bill legislations recommendations Mr. Pennick discussed were concerns about rural housing. The SRABC has three specific recommendations in relation to this topic. The first is using payment history over credit history in the processing of applications. Second, the SRABC recommends creating a training and TA program. Lastly the coalition would like to see funding dedicated to a study on rural housing.

## REGIONAL AND STATE POLICY PRACTICES: CONNECTING WITH LEGISLATORS

*Gina Woods, The Joint Center for Policy and Economic Studies*

Gina Woods of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies gave the final presentation before the individual state coalition break-out sessions. Her presentation began with an overview of the work being done at the Joint Center for those in attendance not familiar with the Center's work and efforts and their recent endeavor to implement an Asset-Building Policy Initiative as a part of the Ford Foundation's national initiative, Building Economic Security over a Lifetime.

Ms. Woods outlined the four major steps of action those trying to influence policy need to take to be successful in their efforts. She encouraged SRABC participants to keep the following points in mind when approaching work to influence policy:

- » Start with the end in mind
- » Identify critical steps for successful policy education and engagement
- » Develop a policy education strategy and identify key resources for engagement
- » Identify and articulated the coalition's policy priorities

Ms. Woods also provided information to conference attendees on the legislative process, since knowledge of this process is essential to the ongoing education of the issues related to asset building. She included a diagram of the lifecycle of a bill through the legislative process and the process once the governor receives the bill. In this portion of the presentation she provided information on how bills are vetoed or passed into law.

## LOUISIANA BREAKOUT SESSION

Louisiana's State Coalition breakout session was utilized to introduce community leaders interested in being involved in the SRABC and develop relationships. The main goal of the breakout session for this state was to begin establishing an idea of what the efforts of their coalition would entail and begin to establish primary bonds among coalition members.

The session began with the moderator posing three questions to those interested in forming an asset building coalition in Louisiana:

- » What does the coalition look like?
- » How do we work together?
- » How do we continue this work in Louisiana with this regional initiative?

After the posing of these questions for reflection, introductions of the individuals in attendance gave members the chance to inform others of the work they were doing in Louisiana and gain a perspective on what work other organizations in Louisiana were doing around asset building. Introductions showed a wide variety of, both urban and rural, organizations were present and interested in participating in an asset building coalition in their state. Introductions showed there were a myriad of different types of organizations, which concentrated on asset building work, in attendance. The following list displays the focus of the different organizations:

- » Advocacy/Equity
- » Legal services/Asset protection
- » Foreclosure
- » Succession/Heir property
- » Human Capital Development
- » Financial Literacy Mindset
- » Youth development
- » Family Based Approach

Following the introductions participants were asked to share their thoughts on the possibility of beginning a coalition with other community leaders in the room. The responses were positive and showed the opportunity for an effective coalition to be established in Louisiana. Participants stated they were excited about the diversity and the commonality in the room; thought if they put a statewide system in place in Louisiana combining all of the services they provided they would have so power in addressing policy issues; and wanted to begin immediately, so they would not lose momentum.

The Louisiana State Asset Building Coalition agreed on a date, time and place for their next meeting before leaving the breakout session. The meeting was scheduled for November 4, 2011. The coalition would come together at this time, prior to the next legislative session, to discuss their strategy in influencing asset building policy for Louisiana.

## ALABAMA BREAKOUT SESSION

The breakout session for the Alabama Asset Building Coalition (AABC) discussed their current and future plans regarding asset building in Alabama. AABC approaches its work in the state through various regions. One example of their regional work is taking place in the Wiregrass region. In the Wiregrass Region, AABC worked with the IRS to increase the number of sites in that region. Residents of the Black Belt region expressed an interest in providing support for micro enterprise opportunities due to this interest AABC has held several meetings in order to address this issue. AABC holds periodic meetings in each of the regions to gain a better understanding of the needs and interests in that area. Similar meetings have been held in the central area of the state as well.

AABC is also working with the United Way in Central Alabama to expand their IDA program to other parts of the state. They are working with the Society for Financial Education and Professional Development to expand financial literacy classes to college students. Focusing on historically black colleges and universities around the state they have reached approximately 800 students. AABC is also working with several groups to develop a Bank On program in the communities of South Alabama, Birmingham and Huntsville.

AABC is conducting an online survey to identify the asset-building priorities from the community perspective. Four key areas have been identified: predatory lending, grocery taxes, housing trust funds and passage of the state's IDA legislation. AABC is working in partnership with Alabama Arise to help disseminate the survey and will use the results to educate members of the state legislature. They are seeking more input from churches and other places of worship.

## FLORIDA BREAKOUT SESSION

The breakout session for Florida included various organizations from Florida. Florida's director Karen Landry discussed the four goals of the Florida Asset Building Network including:

- » To take a different approach to asset building and tap into what's missing
- » To learn from the grassroots what needs to be addressed and what's working and what's not working
- » Reshape how we think about asset building
- » Engage people from the grassroots
- » Opportunity to hear who's doing what



Following this each organization introduced themselves, and presented the work their organization does and why their work is important.



## MISSISSIPPI BREAKOUT SESSION

The Coalition for a Prosperous Mississippi's (CPM) used their breakout session time to provide new or interested parties with an overview of the structure of their coalition and provide updates on the workgroups the coalition has formed to supply all parties with information on their future plans, progress and success of efforts. Ms. Evelyn Njorge and Melbah Smith facilitated the session and began with an introduction for new SRABC conference participants.

Following the introduction, Melbah Smith provided an overview of the work of the Policy and Legislative Workgroup. This group has devised a Bill, which would expand the concept of co-operatives in the state of Mississippi. The present policy provides for the formation agricultural based co-operatives only in the state of Mississippi. The coalition would like to expand the current policy to include housing co-operatives. The Bill was introduced in 2011, but did not pass Congress. The CPM's Policy and Legislative Workgroup plans to present the Bill again in 2012.

While the Policy and Legislative Workgroup has been busy developing the necessary policy, CPM's Housing Workgroup has also been busy working on the housing issue in Mississippi and had some exciting ideas and efforts to share with conference participants.

Tim Collins provided the update for this workgroup. In terms of housing, CPM believes home ownership is important, since it is a source of wealth creation. The CPM's Housing Workgroup is working on cooperative housing. The coalition plans to use the city of Jackson's 2006, two year plan to develop permanent supportive and cooperative housing. The CPM partners in their co-operative housing efforts are the City of Jackson, Jackson State University, Hope Community Credit Union, Catholic Charities and other groups.

The CPM's Financial Education workgroup has been hard at work also. Regina Austin updated participants on the recent initiative of the Financial Education workgroup to train site coordinator for IRS VITA sites. The sites will also provide financial education to community members and help them to become involved in the banking system. Another goal of this workgroup is to begin to offer Money Smart programs in Mississippi.

While partner workgroups are working on policy and programming, the Advocacy and Outreach workgroup of the CPM is conducting community outreach to educate Mississippi citizens on the resources available to them. The education of resources has been huge in the farmer and rancher populations for this workgroup. The Advocacy and Outreach workgroup has also been busy identifying target populations for co-operative housing, with a door to door campaign.

Although the CPM feels their coalition is doing important and necessary work to facilitate asset building in Mississippi, the coalition felt it should take time at the break-out session to identify gaps in outreach and areas for improvement. The CPM identified these as youth development and strengthening the involvement of the Coastal Regions, Northeast Areas and the Delta Region in the coalition.

## PLENARY PANEL: RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE: ASSET DEVELOPMENT BARRIERS FOR NON-CUSTODIAL FATHERS

David Pate & Jacquelyn Boggess, the Center for Family Policy and Practice; Halbert Sullivan, Father's Support Center

The first presentation on Friday morning came from David Pate and Jacquelyn Boggess from the Center for Family Policy and Practice, joined by Halbert Sullivan from the Father's Support Center. Pate, Boggess, and Sullivan discussed the ways in which policies affect non-custodial fathers in America. Each speaker spoke on the difficulties non-custodial fathers face regarding taking care of their children. David Pate discussed the Ford Foundation Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative.

This initiative would provide technical assistance for how child support works and the best practices in engaging fathers in the lives of their children. The initiative would also strive to educate the public and influence policy regarding the engagement of fathers.

A discussion was also led on the programs for low-income men most of the programs did not address the issues and difficulties of non-custodial fathers. Most of the policies regarding custody and child support focus more on mothers and less on fathers. The speakers also discuss other ways in which fathers are assisted such as employment related services, peer support, education, mentoring and parent supporting. However, there are limited programs regarding subsidized employment, legal representation, advocacy, medical care and house assistance. All these factors contribute to fathers being able to support their children. Policies play an important role in 3 ways: the role of the child support system, political will and public education regarding how the child support system works. In 1998 50% of low income non-custodial parents reported living below the poverty line and 60% of low income non-custodial fathers do not pay child support. 80% of unpaid child support debt is owed by parents who make less than \$15,000 of net income.

Mr. Pate and Ms. Boggess also presented several policy recommendations in assisting non-custodial fathers. This includes implementing services that support fatherhood services, reducing assessment fees and other costs for low-income fathers and lastly to change the order modification process and policy to support the needs of low-income men.

Halbert Sullivan then discussed the Father Support Center which gives legal assistance to fathers through attorneys, social workers and law students in order to make visitation attainable for fathers. The Father Support Center strives to put fathers in the system and also to challenge the consequences of fatherless families and improve the lives of community children. Sullivan cited visitation as one of the key factors infringing on non-custodial fathers. If fathers do not have visiting rights they do not want to bear the financial costs of taking care of their child. The Father Support Center also conducted an analysis regarding legal clinics for the poor and found there were no legal clinics reserved for the poor that focus on issues of non-custodial, nonresident parent visitation rights. Based upon their legal research the father support system found two areas in which they could support clients: clients who cannot afford other legal services and clients who are not supported by other legal services. The Father Support Center will measure their social value through several factors:

- » Number of non-custodial (clients) paying child-support, number of non-custodial (clients) that remain in the child's life for at least one year.

- » Number of non-custodial referred to program by previous clients.
- » Numbers of fathers receiving legal visitation.
- » Number of fathers receiving child support modifications.
- » Number of fathers received child custody.
- » Number of non-custodial parents participating in other FSC programs.

The Father Support System is striving to become the premier legal clinic in the state of Missouri that provides services to non-custodial fathers. The long term goals for the Father Support System would be to develop additional law clinics in the state, develop an internship program with law school students within the Missouri area and lastly continue to advocate for policies that recognize the rights of non-custodial parents.

## COMMUNITY VOICES PROJECT

The Community Voices Project strives to develop a policy and an infrastructure that will disseminate information while also developing an infrastructure that will allow for effective communication to take place within the black farmer community. Following this a video presentation was made regarding 3 focus groups of black farmers living in Louisiana. The video addressed various topics such as the ways in which low income people view assets, home ownership, and the difficulties black farmers face in being able to obtain funding to take care of their farms. The purpose of this video was to get the perspective of those in the focus group, treating them as experts of their field while also gaining insight into what the community wants.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Melba Smith, Coalition for a prosperous Mississippi

Melba Smith, lead of the Coalition for a Prosperous Mississippi, provided the closing remarks for this year's SRABC conference. Her closing remarks on the conferences included successes, current challenges of the SRABC, as well as, the coalitions lessons learned. The SRABC's 2011 successes involve the forward movement on building economic security over a lifetime for low-income individuals families and communities, the ability to make practical policies and programs occur through persistence and providing proof that collective action is key. In the face of these successes the coalition also has faced some significant challenges in being more involved in the policy arena and bringing more diversity into their asset building agenda. In addition to the successes and challenges the SRABC has had in 2011, the coalition partners learned many lessons, which will be benefits the coalitions work in the future. Melba Smith spoke of three key lessons the SRABC learned in 2011. (1) Truth gets created by action. (2) The coalition must implement what it learns. (3) The necessity of connecting with legislatures in the area.

From all over the United States organizations gathered at the SRABC conference to discuss the issues and problems currently facing low-income families and individuals. The SRABC Conference in Point Clear, Alabama, called for the opportunity for organizations within the South to come together and create change for these low-income communities. Guest speakers introduced new concept, ideas and pushed for improvements in the area of policy, advocacy and research. More importantly through continual efforts and collaboration, organizations and

coalition members will continue to help low-income families and communities thrive in the future.

## RECEPTION

The first day of the conference ended with a reception featuring live music, award presentations and a testimony regarding the negative impact of payday lending.

Victoria Leasy shared her story regarding her fight against payday lending. Ms. Leasy became a victim of the payday lending system after she became delinquent on one of her payments. Subsequently, Ms. Leasy received a phone call from a man claiming to be a lawyer from the Attorney General's Office (AG). After speaking with family members Ms. Leasy was advised to contact the Center for Justice. It was here Ms. Leasy received further advice regarding her situation and began to advocate for herself. Ms. Leasy contacted the AG office but her calls were refused. Following this, Ms. Leasy tried to pay off her loan however she was still denied the opportunity to do so. Today, she has still not had the opportunity to pay her loan even after continual efforts.



Ms. Rennie Miller shared her story of the Freedom Quilting Bee Cooperatives which grew out of the Civil Rights Movements. Ms. Miller discussed how the Quilting Bee has been a great way to uplift the community however has recently been experiencing some difficulties in sustainability. The Quilting Bee has had difficulties in getting others in the community to take on the work. Following Ms. Miller's presentations an award was presented to Ms. Kilolo Kijakazi for her commitment to creating and strengthening asset-building while also closing the racial wealth gap in the Southeast.





